

## Lectal contamination: how language-external variation becomes language-internal through language contact

Lectal contamination is the language-external counterpart of what has been described as constructional contamination (Pijpops & Van de Velde 2016). In constructional contamination, various superficially similar constructions within one and the same language variety exert an influence on each other, causing lexically-specific preferences for either of two morphological or syntactic variants, depending on which lexemes the superficially related construction share. In lectal contamination, by contrast, lexically-specific preferences may arise due to language contact with another variety that shares the same construction. In particular, lexemes that occur more often in one variety will come to prefer the morphosyntactic variant that is preferentially used in that particular variety, even in the speech of language users of a different variety. As a result, what is essentially a language-external factor conditioning a particular form of linguistic variation may become internalized.

As a case study, we zoom in on the Dutch partitive genitive construction. This construction exhibits variation between a form with and without *-s* ending, as in (1) and (2). The form with the *-s* ending is predominant in the Netherlandic regiolect, while the form without *-s* constitutes a marker of the Belgian regiolect (Pijpops & Van de Velde 2014). Because of this distinction between the Netherlands and Belgium, i.e. a language-external factor, partitive genitive types that feature typically Netherlandic lexemes, such as (1), more often appear in the variant with *-s*, whereas those that contain typically Belgian lexemes, such as (2), will more often appear without the *-s*. Our hypothesis was that these lexical preferences got entrenched, so that Belgian speakers using Netherlandic lexemes would import the Netherlandic morphological variant and vice versa. In other words: while the formal realisation is straightforwardly regionally stratified, we expect these lexical preferences to hold even within the Netherlandic and Belgian regiolects.

- (1) *Iets bijzonder(s)*  
'Something remarkable'
- (2) *Iets speciaal(s)*  
'Something special'

We tested this prediction on 3018 manually checked observations from the ConDiv corpus of written Dutch (Grondelaers et al. 2000) and found it to be confirmed, even when controlling for all other known variables to influence *-s* omission. Furthermore, we drew geographically-tagged data from Twitter, totaling 1299 manually checked instances, to replicate this finding and to investigate the geographical spread of both lectal contamination and the partitive genitive variation.

The effect of lectal contamination can only be explained if we have a sufficiently precise account of how individual speakers operate in language contact situations (Weinreich, Labov & Herzog 1968). If language contact can, in this way, cause lectal variation to produce lect-internal effects, then a variationist description of a particular regio-, dia-, socio- or ethnolect crucially depends on an understanding of language contact.

## References

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